

THE FAIRFAX AREA AGENCY ON AGING PRESENTS CAREGIVER'S CORNER ONLINE JULY 2006

"Caregiver's Corner Online" is an electronic newsletter produced by the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging (AAA) with funding from the National Family Caregiver Support Program of the Older Americans Act. Our goal is to send you information to support you as a family caregiver for an older adult.

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1. ADULT DAY HEALTH CARE OFFERS AN OPTION. If a relative is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or experiences a chronic, debilitating illness, many families may believe that they have only two options for care -- either to provide round-the-clock home care or to place their loved one in a nursing home. Adult day health care offers, for many, a more palatable option.

As more family caregivers are making the choice to care for their loved ones at home in the community, adult day health care (ADHC) is becoming more popular. ADHC programs are designed to provide a safe, fun, and therapeutic environment for frail elderly or adults with disabilities who need supervision during the day due to cognitive and/or physical impairment. They typically offer health monitoring by a registered nurse, nutritious meals, daily exercise programs and other therapeutic activities, assistance with personal care and many opportunities for socialization. The benefits of the program are many as they aim to:

****Prevent or delay the need for institutionalization.**

****Provide a variety of services, including restorative/maintenance therapy, and preventive health care in a single setting.**

****Promote the well-being of participants by providing a variety of activities in a warm, stimulating and social environment.**

****Provide family members relief from their caregiving responsibilities.**

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The Fairfax County Health Department operates six adult day health care centers in response to the mounting need for community based long-term care for the elderly. With over 1 million residents, Fairfax County has seen a significant increase in the senior population over the past 20 years. According to the 2000 Census, 11-1/2 percent of the population or 111,415 persons were age 60 and older.

It is estimated that this population will increase by 43.8 percent in 2010 to 160,188 persons. Residents age 85 and older -- those with the greatest degree of frailty and in most need of long-term care services -- will increase by 38.7 percent from 6,922 persons in 2000 to 9,604 persons in 2010. Adult day health care programs will play a critical role in the long-term care arena as the aging population grows and more caregivers decide to care for their loved ones at home.

For more information about the benefits of the Fairfax County Health Department Adult Day Health Care Program, please contact Shauna Severo at 703-246-8633 or visit their Web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dh/adhc.

For additional options on care for older adults, please call the Aging Information Specialists at the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging at 703-324-7948. We serve residents of Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church.

2. HYPERTHERMIA -- A HOT WEATHER HAZARD FOR OLDER PEOPLE. Irene is retired and she loves to work in her garden. Because she has always spent hours outside, she thinks the heat and humidity of Midwestern summers don't bother her. Then last year an unusual heat wave hit her area. Every day the temperature was over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and the humidity was at least 90%. Five days into the heat wave, her daughter Kim came over because Irene sounded confused on the phone. Kim found her mom passed out on the kitchen floor. The ambulance came quickly when called, but Irene almost died. She had heat stroke, the most serious form of hyperthermia.

Almost every summer there is a deadly heat wave in some part of the country. Too much heat is not safe for anyone. It is even riskier if you are older or if you have health problems. It is important to get relief from the heat quickly. If not, you might begin to feel confused or faint. Your heart could become stressed, and maybe stop beating.

Your body is always working to keep a balance between how much heat it makes and how much it loses. Your brain is the thermostat. It sends and receives signals to and from parts of your body that affect temperature, such as the spinal cord, muscles, blood vessels, skin, and glands that make substances known as hormones. Too much heat causes sweating. When the sweat dries from your skin, the surface of your body cools and your temperature goes down.

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Being hot for too long can cause many of the following illnesses, all grouped under the name hyperthermia:

****Heat cramps** are the painful tightening of muscles in your stomach area, arms, or legs. Cramps can result from hard work or exercise. While your body temperature and pulse usually stay normal during heat cramps, your skin may feel moist and cool. Take these cramps as a sign that you are too hot and find a way to cool your body down. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids, but not those containing alcohol or caffeine.

****Heat edema** is a swelling in your ankles and feet when you get hot. Putting your legs up should help. If that doesn't work fairly quickly, check with your doctor.

****Heat syncope** is a sudden dizziness that may come on when you are active in the heat. If you take a form of heart medication known as a beta blocker or are not used to hot weather, you are even more likely to feel faint when in the heat. Putting your legs up and resting in a cool place should make the dizzy feeling go away.

****Heat exhaustion** is a warning that your body can no longer keep itself cool. You might feel thirsty, dizzy, weak, uncoordinated, nauseated, and sweat a lot. Your body temperature stays normal, and skin feels cold and clammy. Your pulse can be normal or raised. Resting in a cool place, drinking plenty of fluids, and getting medical care should help you feel better soon. If not, this condition can progress to heat stroke.

****Heat stroke** is an emergency -- it can be life threatening! You need to get medical help right away. Getting to a cool place is very important, but so is treatment by a doctor. Many people die of heat stroke each year. Older people living in homes or apartments without air conditioning or good air flow are among those most at risk for heat stroke. So are people who don't drink enough water or those with chronic diseases or alcoholism.

The Signs of Heat Stroke:

****Fainting**, possibly the first sign.

****Body temperature over 104 degrees Fahrenheit.**

****A change in behavior -- confusion, being grouchy, acting strangely, or staggering.**

****Dry flushed skin and a strong rapid pulse or a slow weak pulse.**

****Not sweating -- despite the heat, acting delirious, or being in a coma.**

Who Is at Risk? Hundreds of people die from hyperthermia each year during very hot weather. Most are over 50 years old. The temperature outside or inside does not have to hit 100 degrees Fahrenheit for you to be at risk for a heat-related illness. Health problems that put you at risk include:

****Heart or blood vessel problems, poorly working sweat glands, or changes in your skin caused by normal aging.**

****Heart, lung, or kidney disease, as well as any illness that makes you feel weak all over or causes a fever.**

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****High blood pressure or other conditions that make it necessary for you to change some of the foods you eat. For example, if you are supposed to avoid salt in your food, your risk of heat-related illness may be higher. Check with your doctor.**

****Conditions treated by drugs such as diuretics, sedatives, tranquilizers, and some heart and blood pressure medicines. These may make it harder for your body to cool itself by perspiring.**

****Taking several drugs for a variety of health problems. Keep taking your prescriptions, but ask your doctor what to do if the drugs you are taking make you more likely to become overheated.**

****Being quite a bit overweight or underweight.**

****Drinking alcoholic beverages.**

How Can I Lower My Risk? Things you can do to lower your risk of heat-related illness:

****Drink plenty of liquids -- water or fruit and vegetable juices. Every day you should drink at least eight glasses to keep your body working properly. Heat tends to make you lose fluids so it is very important to drink at least that much, if not more, when it is hot. Avoid drinks containing caffeine or alcohol. They make you lose more fluids. If your doctor has told you to limit your liquids, ask him or her what you should do when it is very hot.**

****If you live in a home or apartment without fans or air conditioning, be sure to follow these steps to lower your chance of heat problems:**

- open windows at night;
- create cross-ventilation by opening windows on two sides of the building;
- cover windows when they are in direct sunlight;
- keep curtains, shades or blinds drawn during the hottest part of the day;
- try to spend at least 2 hours a day (if possible during the hottest part of the day) some place air conditioned -- for example, the shopping mall, the movies, the library, a senior center, or a friend's house if you don't have air conditioning.

****Contact the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging at 703-324-5411 to see if you qualify for assistance with a free fan or help paying energy bills in the summer.**

****If you don't have a car or no longer drive, ask a friend or relative to drive you to a cool place on very hot days. If necessary, take a taxi. Don't stand outside waiting for a bus.**

****Pay attention to the weather reports. You are more at risk as the temperature or humidity rise or when there is an air pollution alert in effect.**

****Dress for the weather. Some people find natural fabrics such as cotton to be cooler than synthetic fibers. Light-colored clothes reflect the sun and heat better than dark colors. If you are unsure about what to wear, ask a friend or family member to help you select clothing that will help you stay cool.**

****Don't try to exercise or do a lot of activities when it is hot.**

****Avoid crowded places when it's hot outside. Plan trips during non-rush hour times.**

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What Should I Remember? Headache, confusion, dizziness, or nausea when you're in a hot place or during hot weather could be a sign of a heat-related illness. Go to the doctor or an emergency room to find out if you need treatment. To keep heat-related illnesses from becoming a dangerous heat stroke, remember to:

- **Get out of the sun and into a cool place -- air conditioning is best.
- **Drink fluids, but avoid alcohol and caffeine. Water and fruit and vegetable juices are best.
- **Shower or bathe, or at least sponge off with cool water.
- **Lie down and rest, if possible in a cool place.
- **Visit your doctor or an emergency room if you don't cool down quickly.

Source: National Institute on Aging (NIA), listed on SeniorNavigator, a Web source of statewide information for older adults and their caregivers in Virginia, www.seniornavigator.com.

For more information on health and aging, please contact the National Institute on Aging Information Center at www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications, telephone 1-800-222-2225; TTY 1-800-222-4225. NIHSeniorHealth.gov is a user-friendly Web site from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine. The simple-to-use Web site features popular health topics for older adults. It has large type and a "talking" function that reads the text out loud.

To see if you qualify for assistance with a free fan or help paying energy bills in the summer, please contact the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging at 703-324-5411, and ask about Fan Care or Cooling Assistance. We serve residents of Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church.

3. DAY OF RESPITE FOR KINSHIP CARE FAMILIES. Are you a grandparent or other relative raising a minor relative? Want a break, a day for yourself, as well as a fun day for your children? Enjoy a free day of respite. Drop off your children, ages 3 and up, for a fun day of recreation. Then use your free time however you want -- to shop, to rest, to attend a movie, whatever. Trained and dedicated staff will provide child care and lead activities.

When: Saturday, August 19

Time: 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Place: Gum Springs Community Center, 8100 Fordson Road, Alexandria, VA 22306

Pre-registration is required. Call 703-324-5205 with questions or for registration information. Respite Day is being offered as a joint project of the Department of Community and Recreation Services, the Fairfax County Department of Family Services, the Fairfax County Public Schools, the Kinship Care Committee of Fairfax County, and the Fairfax County Department of Systems Management for Human Services.

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4. ALZHEIMER'S FAMILY DAY CENTER PRESENTS FREE CLASSES FOR

CAREGIVERS. These classes are geared toward families who are currently taking care of a relative or friend with memory loss. Professional care providers are also welcome to attend.

All sessions are at Alzheimer's Family Day Center, 2812 Old Lee Highway, Suite 210, Fairfax, and run from 1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

- Communication and Behavior, July 18
- Financial Aspects of Caregiving, July 25
- Travel and Dementia, August 1

Reservations are required. Please call Anna at 703-204-4664. Free respite care is available on request.

5. GRANDPARENT SUPPORT GROUPS CONTINUE THROUGH SUMMER. If you or someone you know provides custodial care for minor relatives, the kinship care support groups are a way to touch base with other such caregivers. Sponsored by the Fairfax County Department of Family Services and Fairfax County Public Schools, Family Services and Involvement Section, groups are meeting as follows:

- Bryant Alternative High School, 2709 Popkins Lane, Alexandria;
one Thursday per month in June, July, and August.
- Pennino Human Services Building, 12011 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax;
two Tuesdays per month in June, July, and August.

Childcare is provided for those who are pre-registered. For details, please call Robin Hamby at 703-277-2640 or Colleen Turner at 703-324-5489; TTY: 703-449-1186.

6. PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF "CAREGIVER'S CORNER ONLINE" NEWSLETTER.

Current and past editions of the "Caregiver's Corner Online" newsletter are available online at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/aaa/caregivers_corner_nl.htm.

Please note that these items are included for informational purposes only and do not imply endorsement by the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging or Fairfax County Government.

For further information, please contact an Aging Information Specialist at the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging (telephone: 703-324-7948; TTY 703-449-1186 or e-mail: fairfax_aaa@fairfaxcounty.gov). Visit our Web site at: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/aaa.
